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GLOUCESTER—THREE CENTURIES A FISHING PORT

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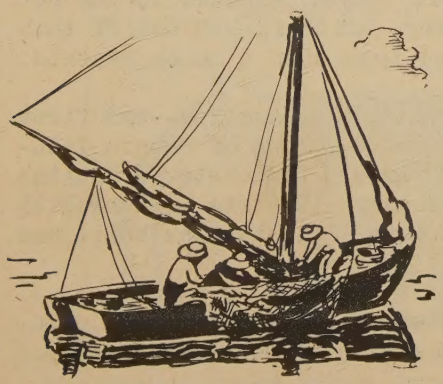
Since 1623, stories relating to the daring, courage, and resourcefulness of the Gloucester fishermen in their everlasting struggle with the sea, have been an interesting and important part of American history. The greatest contribution of the Gloucester fishermen to their nation, however, has been their record of the past five years. From January 1941 through December 1945, 878,500,000 pounds of fish were landed at Gloucester. These landings, made at a time when the United States was engaged in furnishing food and armaments for her own country, as well as for her Allies, were a noteworthy achievement. The last three years of this period saw the port of Gloucester emerge as the nation's foremost producer of food fish.

Gloucester, which has now functioned as a fishing port for 322 consecutive years, was settled primarily as a fishing center for the procurement and curing of fish for Europe. There was a period when fishing fell into decline on Cape Ann, and farming was attempted by many; but the majority of the farmers returned to the sea and to fishing after a few years, discouraged by the unfavorable terrain and poor soil, which were not conducive to profitable farming.

The early fishermen used small boats open to the sea, air, and rain, and with only one mast and a small sail. Since the fishing grounds were but a short distance from shore, the small craft proved large enough to supply the demand of Gloucester and its neighboring communities. As the supply of fish near the shoreline began to decrease, it became necessary for the Gloucester fishermen to build and equip boats capable of catching and carrying more fish and of venturing farther to sea.



The early 1700's found Gloucester vessels venturing farther and farther to the Eastward--Sable Island, then the Grand Banks of Newfoundland. This required larger and faster vessels of better design. Thus was created Gloucester's fleet of fine vessels which became famous throughout the world. The development of a salt-fish trade with Spain and the West Indies in the middle 1700's gave further stimulation to Gloucester's fisheries and helped to establish the port as a major fishing center of the North Atlantic.

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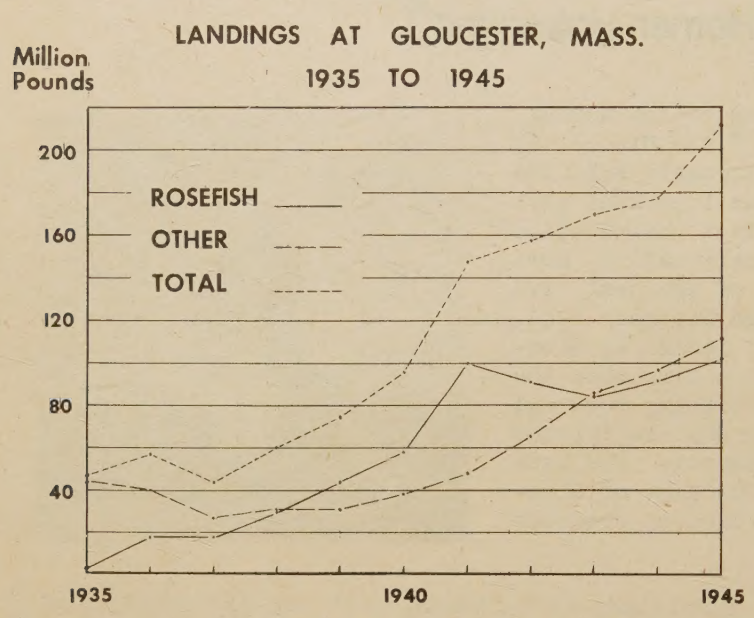
The 1800's saw many important changes and advances in the fisheries. Halibut, which had had little or no market, rose to prominence as a fresh, as well as a smoked delicacy. The French system of trawl-line fishing was introduced as an improvement on the hook and line method. This trawl was a long line with hundreds of hooks on short gangings at short intervals. Since this line could not properly be used by a large crew from the deck of the vessel, the use of dories came into being--one or two men to each dory with several tubs of trawl to a boat. This type of fishing resulted in increased dangers to the fishermen and the loss of many lives. Many a dory has lost sight of the mother vessel during sudden squalls and snow storms and was never seen again.

In the middle of the century, the hook and line was replaced by the purse seine in the mackerel fishery. The purse seine was ragarded with suspicion by many who thought it would spell the end of all mackerel, since it took thousands of fish in one set. One hundred years of fishing by this means, however, has proven that these fears were unwarranted.



About this same time, ice was first used in quantity to preserve fish. Fishermen had long believed that ice, being formed of fresh water, could not be used in the preservation of salt-water fish. Once this false supposition was blasted, it was possible for the fishermen to better preserve their catch while at sea, and to ship the product greater distances when the vessel arrived at port.

Gill-net fishing was introduced to Gloucester in the late 1870's. The nets were set and hauled by hand from a dory. This method of fishing was not very popular or productive until around 1908, when five or six small gill netters, fully equipped, arrived in Gloucester from Michigan. The methods of the lake fishermen, utilizing a mechanical lifter which enabled setting and hauling the nets directly from the vessel, proved very successful. This resulted in the establishment of a sizable gill-net fleet at Gloucester, which fished out of that port for several years. The fleet is now reduced to less than a dozen vessels.

The otter trawl--the fishermen's contribution to mass production--was first used in the New England fisheries in 1905. This was the beginning of modern fishing and big business in the fresh fish industry and it marked Gloucester's decline from its position as New England's principal fishing port. The New England Fish Exchange was organized in Boston in 1908 and the Boston Fish Pier was built and made ready for occupation in 1914.

As the fresh fish landings at Boston increased steadily year by year, Gloucester was reduced to a second-rate power in the New England fisheries. Landings

at Gloucester fluctuated between 20 and 50 million pounds with the exception of the years 1918 and 1919, in each of which over 60 millions were landed. Receipts hit their lowest ebb in 1933, when 18 million pounds were reported. Gloucester's salt-fish industry, which had been her main support for years, held its own with the fresh-fish landings until the outbreak of World War I. The last year to show any sizable production of salt cod was 1915; subsequently, the industry decreased yearly until it became almost non-existent.

In the past decade, with the development of rosefish as a food fish, Gloucester has shown a constant increase in landings. Although the filleting of rosefish originated in Boston, lack of space for facilities necessary to the handling of this new product caused the fishery to move to Gloucester, where there were sevweal wharves and buildings available for use. This paved the way for "the golden era of fishing" for the port of Gloucester.

As fishing for rosefish continued to expand, it became apparant that the existing facilities at Gloucester also were inadequate. The wharves and buildings were not designed to handle the tremendous volume of fish delivered to the port. Filleting plants required more space and more modern methods than were provided by the existing establishments. To provide the additional space, new plants were built and older ones remodeled.

At present, the processing plants practically cover the shoreline of Gloucester's entire inner harbor, with some 23 companies occupying 22 wharves. Almost every firm has its own wharf or wharves. One exception, however, is the State Fish Pier, on which five companies are operating.

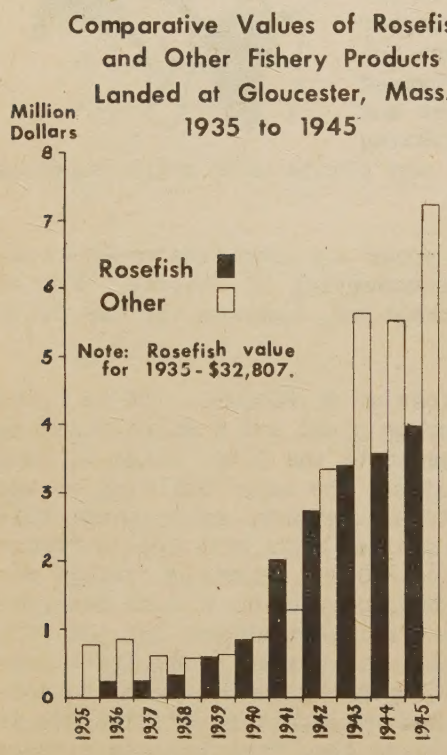
The State Fish Pier was built in 1938, at a cost of $1,200,000. It is 1,165 feet long and 300 feet wide and supports a cold-storage plant and a store building containing seven stalls. The entire project is leased to the City, which in turn rents stalls and storage space to individual companies. The major building on the Pier is the public freezer. At present, this plant is four stories high, with a daily freezing capacity of 200,000 pounds, a storage capacity of 5,000,000 pounds, and an ice-producing capacity of 240 tons per day. On July 20, 1945, a bill was passed by the State Legislature and signed by the Governor, authorizing a further expenditure of $250,000 in order to increase the freezing and storage facilities of the existing plant by the construction of an additional story.

Gloucester's eagerness to comply with the country's increasing demand for frozen fillets wrought changes, not only in the appearance of the waterfront, but in the methods applied in producing the finished product. Machinery and conveyors were devised to carry the fish from the scales, after being unloaded from the vessels, directly to the workers. Even more important was the introduction of the automatic scaling machine in 1938. Previous to the intro-

duction of the automatic scaler, the manually operated "hand-scaler" had been replaced by an electrical hand-scaler. One man equipped with an electric scaler could supply two cutters. This crew could handle about 600 pounds per hour. The automatic scaler, however, was capable of scaling 15,000 pounds per hour.

In the summer of 1944, landings at Gloucester were so heavy that the freezer was unable to handle the great amounts required of it. This factor, together with the shortage of manpower in the various filleting plants throughout the City, resulted in the loss of many thousand pounds of fish. In order to rectify this, the Atlantic Fishermen's Union voted to introduce a system of limiting the catch on small whiting draggers to 20,000 pounds per trip, with a 5-day vacation between trips for the larger rosefish vessels. Although this curtailed production at a time when it was most urgently needed, it guaranteed a more equitable distribution of the landings and assured the public of a better grade of fish.

The heavy demand for fish throughout the latter part of 1944 and the early months of 1945 brought the freezer holdings at Gloucester, as well as in the entire country, to a new low. While the summer season opened with plenty of freezer space available, the increased manpower shortage curtailed the production of the rosefish draggers. During the period June 2-8, more than 9,500,000 pounds of fish were landed at Gloucester's wharves. Total landings for the month were 33,577,000 pounds, of which 18,259,000 pounds were rosefish. This was more than the under-staffed filleting plants could handle, and once more, many thousand pounds spoiled in the plants and in the vessels. As a consequence, the fishermen voted a 3-day layover for vessels landing up to 65,000 pounds; 4 days for those landing between 25,000 and 125,000 pounds; and 5 days for those landing over 125,000 pounds.



The armed forces took much of the manpower of the fisheries. Gloucester's mainstays during the war were the women and school children, who replaced their husbands, brothers, and sons in the processing plants. Since VJ Day, many veterans have returned to the industry, and the coming year should find great improvement in the industry's manpower situation.

The majority of families in Gloucester are directly or indirectly dependent upon the success of the fishermen for a livelihood. There are between 180 and 190 vessels operating out of the port with crews ranging from 4 to 14 men. The 23 plants engaged in processing and packaging fish employ about 2,400 persons. Other industries in the city, which are closely associated with the fisheries, are a branch factory of one of the largest net and twine manufacturers in the country, two marine railway companies, three major trucking concerns, a fish meal plant, two glue factories, several ship chandlers, three ice plants, two canvas goods houses, a cod liver oil plant, and a manufacturer of oil clothes.

Although Gloucester has a normal population of 25,000, with a summer population of almost double that figure, it has remained, at heart, a small town fishing port. Its citizens have continued as a closely knit unit throughout the years. Their financial status fluctuates with that of its fisheries. Good years produce more buying power; lean years are reflected in the business of its shops and appearance of its homes. A tragedy at sea casts a pall over the entire port, while a celebration by the fleet means a rejoicing for all.

Is it any wonder that Gloucester takes pride in the feats and accomplishments of its fishermen and pays tribute to "THEY THAT GO DOWN TO THE SEA IN SHIPS."